MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND TRADE

NEWS RELEASE

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TIMOR GAP ZONE OF COOPERATION TREATY - INAUGURAL MINISTERIAL COUNCIL MEETING

The Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Senator Gareth Evans, will tomorrow attend the inaugural Ministerial Council meeting of the Timor Gap Treaty in Bali.

Senator Evans said today that the meeting was an occasion of great symbolic and practical importance in the bilateral relationship between Australia and Indonesia.

"The commitment by both Australian and Indonesian Governments to expand cooperation in practical matters is nowhere better illustrated than in the Timor Gap Zone of Cooperation Treaty," he said.

"The Treaty represents a creative solution to a diplomatic impasse on boundary negotiations which will result in mutual economic benefits while removing a potential source of bilateral and regional friction. It establishes a unique set of institutional arrangements and a regime for the exploration and development of petroleum resources in the Timor Gap area".

Senator Evans said the inaugural Ministerial Council meeting would address a number of administrative issues including the creation of a smooth operational framework for the Joint Authority and the appointment of an Executive Director from each country.

The Ministerial Council would deal in a practical way with issues that would inevitably arise during the Treaty's lifetime. Cooperation flowing from it would remain an important factor in the stability of Australia's relationship with Indonesia.

Senator Evans said that the Indonesian Foreign Minister, Mr Ali Alatas, and the Indonesian Minister for Mines and Energy, Mr Ginandjar Kartasamita would attend the Ministerial Council meeting, as would the Australian Minister for Resources, Mr Alan Griffiths.

The Australian and Indonesian Parliamnents have passed legislation ratifying the treaty and it is due to come into force concurrently with the first Ministerial Council meeting tomorrow.

CANBERRA

Timor claim strains ties with Indonesia

SUNDAY HERALD 17/2/91

From JENNY MAY in Jakarta

The Australian ambassador to Indonesia, Mr Philip Flood, this week denied he had accused the Australian media of "manipulating" reports on East Timor.

But the timing of the denial has disappointed the only accredited Australian media representative in Indonesia, AAP correspondent Tom Hyland.

Hyland said Mr Flood had had 36 hours — "ample time" — in which to deny the report before it was published in the Australian press.

The report of the Flood statement, by the Indonesian newsagency Antara, has again spotlighted two of the most sensitive issues in the two countries' relations — East Timor and media coverage.

Mr Flood was originally quoted as telling a regional military commander, Major-General Sintong Panjaitan, in Bali that Australian journalists continued to tarnish the image of the Indonesian Government.

The remarks followed a visit to East Timor by Mr Flood and an Australian parliamentary delegation, which was covered by three Australian journalists.

Mr Flood said Maj-Gen. Panjaitan had made the criticism, to which he did not respond. An embassy spokesman told *The Sunday Herald* Antara had apologised verbally.

AAP's coverage of East Timor has often been critical of Indonesia. Correspondents from Reuter, the BBC, Agence France-Presse and the *New York Times* have also questioned the Indonesian version of events in East Timor.

New York Times correspondent Steve Erlanger has upset authorities. His reports helped widen US congressional criticism of Indonesia over its occupation of East Timor.

Six Australian journalists died during the Indonesian takeover in 1975.

The Antara report and the subsequent echoes in the Indonesian press have again set back what has officially been described as a "more understanding" relationship between Indonesia and the Australian press.